

Boundless Curiosity

A tribute to Whitney Wang Watson (1997-2015)

[Campus News](#) | Posted on January 18, 2016



Whitney, a sophomore at Andrews University, passed away on December 15, 2015, on Mt. Whitney in California while doing something she loved with a passion: Mountain climbing with her dad.

By: Becky St. Clair

Whitney Wang Watson, sophomore mathematics and music major, was born on March 2, 1997. As a child she spent her days at the daycare on the UCLA campus where her parents worked, and told people she went to school at UCLA. At five years old she began learning the violin.

“Even though she did really well at it, Whitney would be the first to tell you she didn’t really like the violin,” says her sister, WayAnne. “She loved sewing, knitting, cooking and gardening with Grandma—basically any activity in Martha Stewart Living magazine—and playing with her cousins.”

A fantastic cook and baker, Whitney loved making vegan desserts because of the challenge.

“It drove her crazy to cook with me,” says Whitney’s mother, Marilene Wang, with a smile. “We’re Chinese and you don’t cook with recipes. For vegan food you have to follow the recipes quite closely, and she always double checked my measuring because she didn’t trust me.”

Whitney’s friends and family remember her unique hobbies and her obsession with cooking shows on television. WayAnne shares,

“I always felt like, ‘Whit, you don’t even let us eat margarine at our house, why do you need to learn how to roast a quail?’ But she loved it.”

A brilliant student with a full four-year scholarship to Andrews, Whitney didn’t need to spend a lot of time working on homework. As a result she was able to develop some of her unique hobbies. She lined her room with origami foldings she had made, and once she made a woven reusable grocery bag for her mother out of plastic bags.

“Whitney hated attention,” says Marilene. “When we’d go shopping together she would hide when it came time to go through the checkout, because inevitably someone would ask about my unique bag and I would tell them my daughter made it. They would ooh and aah over it and ask her how she made it. She hated the attention and did her best to stay out of sight because of that.”

Andrews University could have used Whitney as a poster child for its wellness initiative. A determined, driven and energetic young woman, Whitney was known for the healthy choices she made each and every day. She exercised at least an hour every day, chose the healthiest food in the cafeteria and slept 9-11 hours every night. Her hobbies included skiing (which she picked up when she was just 22 months old), mountain climbing, bicycling, backpacking, camping, and running.

It wasn’t just her physical self she maintained well; Whitney embodied what it meant to nurture one’s body, mind and spirit.

“Above all of her gifts, I know that Whitney had a personal relationship with Jesus and was committed to his service,” recalls one student. “She was dedicated to learning more about Jesus. As she rests until the second coming of Christ, I will strive to be like her. I am grateful for the personal blessing she was to me and to many others.”

Her roommate, Celesta Burt, shares her reflection on a conversation she had with Whitney last semester. Celesta asked Whitney what she most appreciated in a person—what drew her to someone.

“She said she was drawn to people who were friendly and kind,” says Celesta. “I don’t think she realized that she had the very qualities she appreciated in others. Whitney lived her faith not just in words but in actions. She would take time to listen to people, give encouragement to the person who was struggling, and was part of several ministry activities.”

During her time at Andrews University, Whitney made an impression on many for her academic interests and abilities.

“Her gentle participation in class and her exceptional written work consistently revealed a brilliant mind and a boundless curiosity about the world, her place in it and her moral and ethical obligations to others,” says Monique Pittman, chair of the J.N. Andrews Honors program at Andrews University.

“She was doing a double major, practicing viola two hours a day, piano an hour a day, exercising at least an hour a day, acing all her 21 credits, tutoring, grading, playing in a string quartet and orchestra and reading Homer’s ‘Odyssey’ in her spare time,” says WayAnne. “And everyone still recognized her loyalty, diligence and dedication. She was the one who would show up for everything prepared and collected.”

After graduating from Fountainview Academy in British Columbia, Canada, Whitney spent a summer serving at Aeon Health Center in Malaysia, where she learned some Chinese while helping people from all over Asia and the world turn their lives around through diet and exercise.

“Shortly before she died, Whitney talked about what medical specialty she wanted to study,” says her mother, Marilene. “She told me she wanted to do something that would be useful in the mission field—something like orthopedic surgery. But she also noted that all the orthopedic surgeons she’d met seemed to be big tough men. I told her I thought she could do it because she’s tough, too.”

Whitney’s professors will always remember her as “a front-row smiler,” as Pittman called her. She was the student who sat at rapt attention throughout the class period, making eye contact with the professor and nodding while taking avid notes. They will remember, as Claudio Gonzalez, director of the University Symphony Orchestra, does, that she took her classes “with enthusiasm, commitment and joy.”

“She had a wide vision of the discussion, and she had a sharp awareness of her own skills,” says Gonzalez. “She was a natural achiever, demonstrating a gracious talent for leadership and commitment to service.”

Whitney’s life and relationship with God made a difference in many others’ lives, and her death has reminded us of the hope we cling to in moments of pain and suffering.

“Whitney’s life and death are reminders to us of how precious and fragile life can be,” her mother says. “I’m so grateful we have our Great Hope of looking forward to the resurrection. This was a very painful goodbye, but it’s not a permanent one.”

And in the words of Shandelle Henson, chair of the Department of Mathematics, in her tribute during Whitney’s memorial service:

“Our Lord walked the earth for only 33 years and He fundamentally changed the world forever. In following Him for 18 years, Whitney, too, has blessed the world. Her Christ-like kindness to us will multiply and multiply, like the loaves and fishes, to bless humankind forever, until we meet her again in the fullness of the Lord’s presence.”

Funds in Whitney's honor have been set up at organizations that were dear to both her and her family. To make a donation in Whitney's name, use the following links:

[Andrews University Memorial Fund](#)

[Fountainview Academy](#)

[ASAP Ministries](#)

[Loma Linda Health Vision 2020](#)

Contact:

PR

pr@andrews.edu

269-471-3322